DIGGLE • PISA • SEGALA

THE EXPANSE™

DRAGON TOOTH

VOLUME THREE

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THE EXPANSE

DRAGON TOOTH

VOLUME THREE

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DRAGON TOOTH

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CHAPTER NINE

"ON DESPERATE GROUND, FIGHT."
- SUN TZU, THE ART OF WAR

U.N.N. INTELLIGENCE DIRECTORATE
EARTH
10 YEARS LATER

TEN-HUT! OFFICER ON DECK!

AS YOU WERE, MARINES.

WELCOME ABOARD, SIR. MAKE YOURSELF COMFORTABLE, AND WE'LL BE ON OUR WAY.

VERY GOOD.

THE SOONER WE GET THIS OVER WITH, THE BETTER.

SPARROWHAWK, YOU ARE CLEAR FOR ASCENT.

GIVE MY REGARDS TO THE OLD LADY.

BE ADVISED, NOTAM IS IN EFFECT. ALL OTHER FLIGHTS ARE DIVERTED.

ROGER THAT T-C, AND THANK YOU. WE'LL BRING YOU A MOON ROCK.

THAT WON'T BE NECESSARY, SPARROWHAWK. MY DAUGHTER WORKS THERE AND HONESTLY, I GOT MORE THAN I KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH.

ORBITAL INSERTION ACQUIRED. KILLING LAUNCH DRIVE.

ANYTHING ELSE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD?

NOPE. THEY BOUGHT US OPEN SKIES, ALL THE WAY TO LUNA.

THEN WHAT DO I NEED YOU FOR?

ALL GOOD...?

I'M AFRAID THERE'S AN ISSUE.

I'LL HAVE TO GIVE YOU A SHOT.

WOAH, EASY THERE— THERE'S—

...HUH. HEH HEH!

IS...IS THAT A REAL GUN...?

I'M AFRAID IT'S VERY REAL. AND AS YOU KNOW, GUNS AREN'T ALLOWED. SO THERE'LL HAVE TO BE AN *INVESTIGATION.*

I'M GOING TO ASK YOU SOME *QUESTIONS.* IT'S VERY IMPORTANT THAT YOU TELL ME THE *TRUTH.*

THAT BRIEFCASE CONTAINS HIGHLY CLASSIFIED MATERIAL. DO YOU HAVE THE APPROPRIATE CLEARANCE?

YEAH, MAN, YEAH. TAKE IT EASY, I GOT ALL KINDS...

I MEAN I'M GOOD, S'ALL GOOD, I'M A GOOD GUY—

I DON'T BELIEVE YOU. PROVE IT.

OPEN IT.

THAT—

...WOULDN'T THAT BE BAD? I MEAN, I DUNNO, IT FEELS...BAD...

LOOK AT ME. YOU SEE THE GUN. THE GUN IS BAD. SO THERE'S A PROBLEM.

FIX THE PROBLEM. OPEN THE CASE.

GUN IS BAD, THAT'S RIGHT...CASE IS GOOD, I'M GOOD...

HERE, I CAN PROVE IT...RIGHT HERE...

GOOD BOY.

ARMED

I DON'T... UNDERSTAND...

WHY... ARE YOU DOING THIS...?

FOR LACONIA.

MEDINA STATION
IN THE RING SPACE

THINK ABOUT IT. MAKES PERFECT SENSE!

NO WINDOWS ON A SHIP.

PLUS YOU'VE GOT LAYERS OF CERAMIC AND TITANIUM COMPOSITE PLATING BETWEEN YOU AND THE SUN.

OUT AT THE EDGE OF THE SYSTEM, SUNLIGHT'S PRETTY NEGLIGIBLE.

EXACTLY! THIS IS WHAT I'M SAYING!

GOD DAMN. YOU'RE RIGHT.

SPACE *IS* THE PERFECT PLACE FOR VAMPIRES.

WHAT ABOUT *WEREWOLVES,* THOUGH? HAVE YOU GOTTA SEE *LUNA* TO WOLF OUT?

IF I WAS A WEREWOLF, I'D LIVE AROUND *JUPITER.* THAT SUCKER'S GOT, LIKE, A *HUNDRED* MOONS.

ANY TIME, ONE OF 'EM'S GOTTA BE FULL, RIGHT?

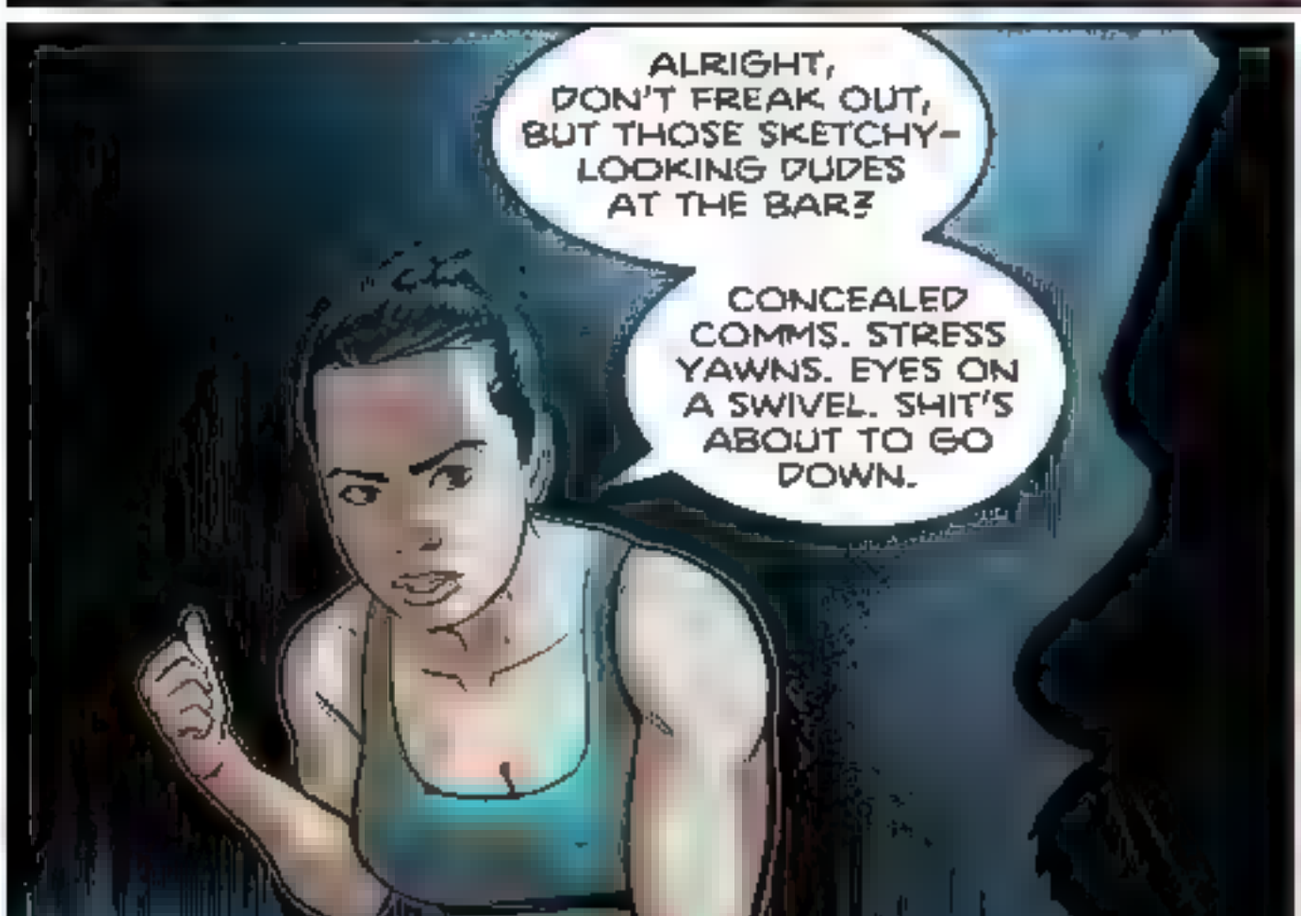
Y'KNOW WHAT, YOU MIGHT BE ONTO SOMETHING THERE. I KNEW THIS DOCK MANAGER BACK ON CALLISTO, AND HE WAS *HAIRY.*

EYEBROWS MET IN THE MIDDLE.

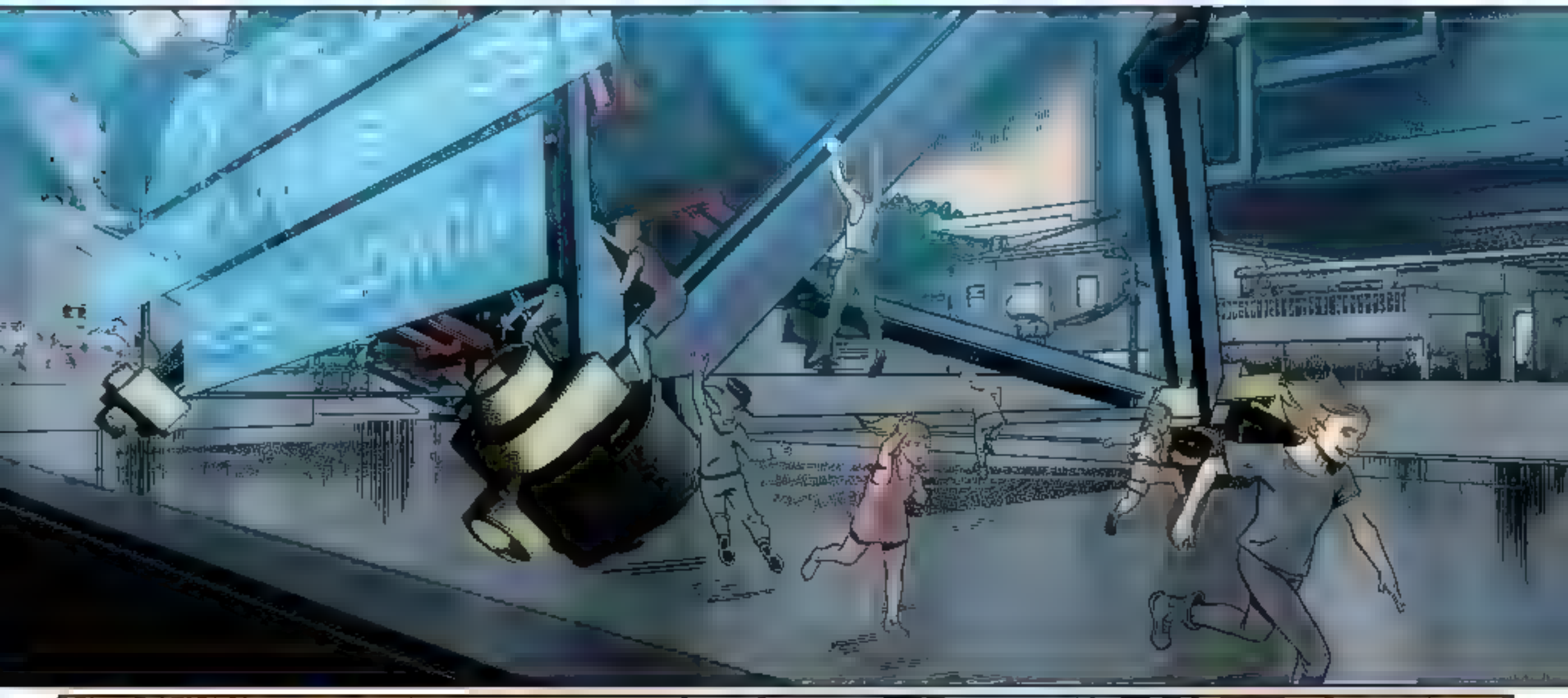
SAME AGAIN. KEEP 'EM COMIN'.

SOYÁ, KOPENG.

I GOTTA HIT THE HEAD...


ALRIGHT, DON'T FREAK OUT, BUT THOSE SKETCHY-LOOKING DUDES AT THE BAR?
CONCEALED COMMS. STRESS YAWNS. EYES ON A SWIVEL. SHIT'S ABOUT TO GO DOWN.

NOT OUR PROBLEM.
THERE'S KIDS HERE.



...FUCK.

OKAY, SO LISTEN. I DON'T REALLY A GIVE A SHIT, WHATEVER YOU GOT GOIN' ON. BUT TAKE IT SOMEPLACE ELSE.

OR WHAT, *INYA?*

OR THERE'S GONNA BE A PROBLEM.

YOU MAKE PROBLEM FOR ***THREE*** OF US, *DZHEMANG?* YOU AN' WHAT ARMY?

THIS ONE.

JUST MOVE IT ALONG, OKAY? WHATEVER YOU'RE HERE FOR, TAKE IT TO THE DOCKS. MOST OF THE CAMERAS ARE BROKEN ALREADY.

TIME TO GO, *BELTALOWDA MALI MI. NA SÉFETIYE...*

FUKITING, KOYO?

IMALOWDA KOPENG TO...?

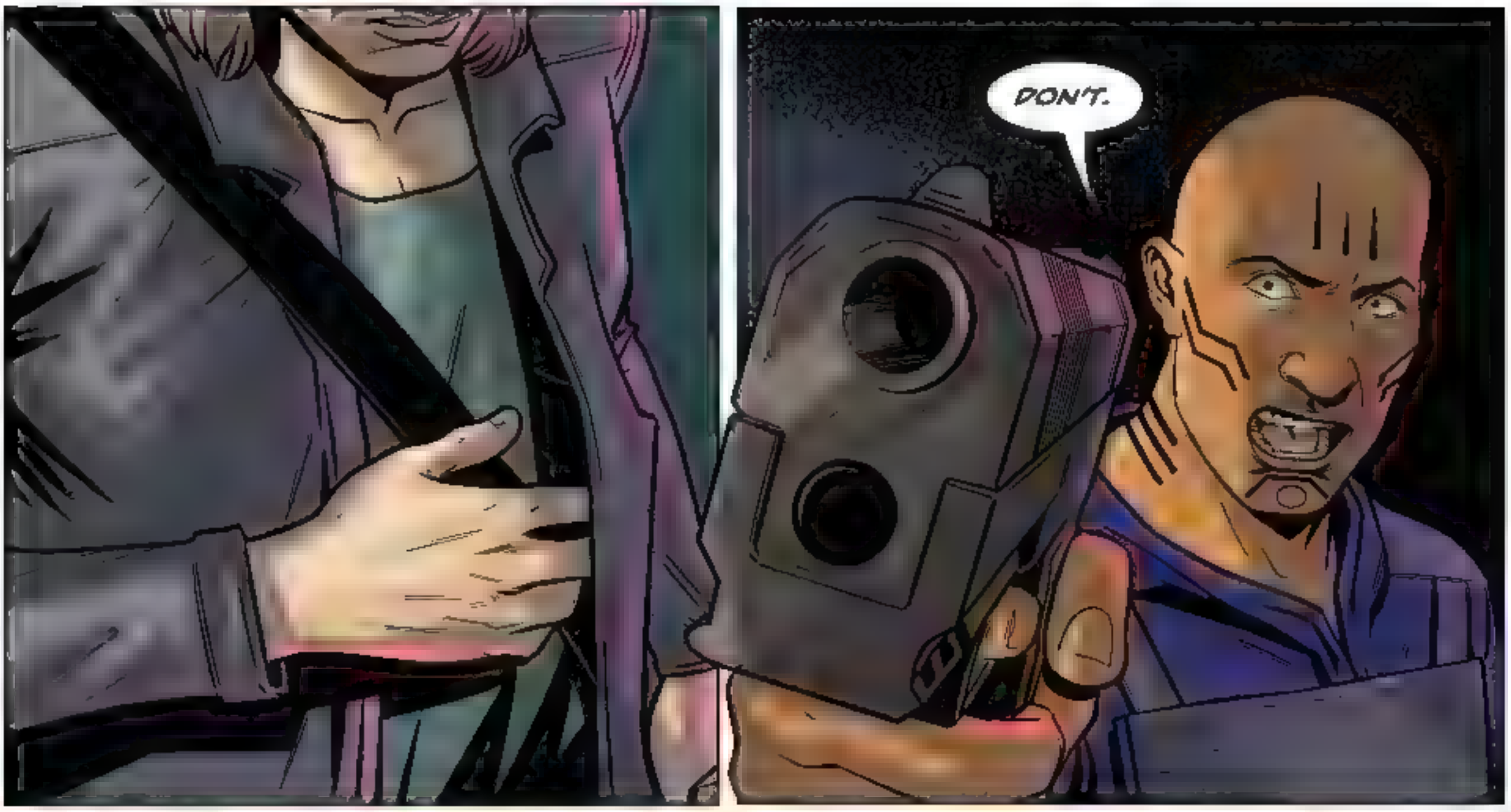
MI NO KENG INYALOWDA. LOOKIN' TO GET 'EMSELVES *KILL*, MI PENSA.

FUNNY TO SAY, *BERATNA*. AS IT HAPPEN, DEAL *CHANGE*...

WE TAKE THE *SCRIP* AN' *KEEP* THE MEDS, *KE*?

FUCK. I HATE BEING RIGHT.

WE COULD BE DRINKIN' RIGHT NOW.


DON'T.

FUGHH--

AGH-!

USE IT OR GIVE IT TO ME.

WELL, SHIT.

ANY HOLES IN YOU?

USUAL AMOUNT.

UH-OH.

I LEAVE YOU GUYS ALONE FOR LIKE, *FIVE MINUTES.*

PUT IT AWAY, CAMINA. COME TO BED.

THIS CAN'T WAIT.

BESIDES, IF I STOP DOING THIS, SHAY MIGHT STOP DOING THAT.

SOME OTHER THINGS I COULD DO, YOU MIGHT LIKE EVEN BETTER.

YOU CANNOT BE *BOSMANG* EVERY HOUR...

DON'T GIVE ME *GUILT* FOR WHAT I *HAVE* TO DO!

...I'M SORRY. YOU DON'T DESERVE THAT.

YOU HAVE SHARP EDGES, CAMINA. ALWAYS DID.

BUT I'M A DOCTOR. I KNOW HOW TO HANDLE SHARP EDGES.

SOYÁ CAMINA. ME AND SHAY, WE BEEN TALKING. ABOUT US. OUR *FAMILY.* WE...WEREN'T SURE HOW YOU WOULD REACT.

WE HAVE A GOOD LIFE HERE, BUT... SOMETHING IS *MISSING.*

PERHAPS... A *BABY.*

YOU TALK ABOUT A *CHILD* BEHIND MY *BACK...*

AND YOU WORRY HOW I WOULD *REACT?!*

WE KNOW THE PART OF YOU THAT OTHERS DO NOT SEE, *SETARA MI.*

YOU WANT NOT ONLY TO BUILD, BUT TO NURTURE. PROTECT.

YOU HAVE IMPORTANT WORK, IS TRUE. WE CANNOT GO TO GANYMEDE. BUT WE HAVE DECENT *GRAVITY* HERE.

AND WE CAN *AFFORD* THE *GOOD* BONE DENSITY MEDS! NO NEED FOR BLACK MARKET, LIKE *DZHEMANG* DIE TODAY...

SOMEONE *DIED* FOR *GOOD* SOMEX?

AUTOPSY, THIS SHIFT. SOME DRUG DEAL GO BAD. *BELTALOWDA* TRY TO BUY *OSTEO-X.*

SCAN SAY THEY BEEN *USING* THEIR WHOLE LIFE--

WAIT. MEDINA *BELTALOWDA* USING RESTRICTED *MARTIAN* MEDS *FROM BIRTH?*

WHO CAN AFFORD THAT?

CAMINA, WE TRY TO TALK ABOUT OUR *FAMILY.*

AND I'M THE *PRESIDENT.*

THE BELT COME FIRST. ALWAYS. YOU KNOW THAT.

WHY THIS NOW? TELL US.

ROCINANTE CAUGHT A *SABOTEUR.* YEARS AGO NOW. SOHIRO PIRATE FACTION. OR SO WE THOUGHT.

AUTOPSY SHOW HE USED *OSTEO-X.* FROM *BIRTH...*

...BECAUSE HE WASN'T *BELTALOWDA* AT ALL, BUT *MARTIAN SPECIAL FORCES.*

DRAGON TOOTH.

LUNA

I CAN'T REMEMBER THE LAST TIME WE ISSUED A REPORT ON PAPER. HARD TO COME BY THESE DAYS.

ASYMMETRIC WARFARE CONTINGENCIES IN THE RING SPACE

TS/SCI EYES ONLY

I'M OLD-FASHIONED LIKE THAT. WHEN I COMMISSION A REPORT, I LIKE TO KNOW IT CAN'T BE RE-WRITTEN ON THE FLY.

THIS IS WHAT YOUR INTELLIGENCE OFFICER WAS CARRYING WHEN THE SHUTTLE WAS LOST?

IN DIGITAL FORMAT, YES, MA'AM. HE WAS EN ROUTE TO LUNA TO BRIEF YOU PERSONALLY, AS REQUESTED.

WALK ME THROUGH IT.

TELL ME ABOUT THE *DARK SIDE* OF THE RING

MA'AM, ENTRY INTO THE RING SPACE CAN ONLY BE EFFECTED FROM THE SUNWARD SIDE.

YOU'LL FORGIVE THE EXPRESSION, BUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SOMEONE FLIES A SHIP UP ITS *BACKSIDE*?

NOTHING. THE DARK SIDE IS INERT.

WE...DON'T FULLY UNDERSTAND HOW THAT WORKS YET. BUT EVERY PROBE WE'VE SENT THROUGH FROM THAT SIDE SIMPLY PASSES THROUGH THE RING WITHOUT EFFECT.

IT'S BASICALLY JUST A BIG EMPTY HULA HOOP IN SPACE.

AND WHAT IF *ANOTHER* SHIP WAS EMERGING *FROM* THE RING SPACE, AT THE EXACT SAME TIME AND LOCATION?

WOULDN'T BOTH SHIPS END UP IN THE SAME PLACE?

THAT'S CORRECT, MA'AM. THEORETICALLY, THE RING GATE WOULD TRANSPOSE THE TRANSITING SHIP INTO THE SAME VOLUME.

THEORETICALLY?

WE'VE NEVER TESTED IT--FOR GOOD REASON. DETAILS ARE IN THE REPORT.

SIMPLY PUT, MATTER DOESN'T LIKE BEING MASHED TOGETHER LIKE THAT. SPECIFICALLY THE FORCES HOLDING MATTER TOGETHER AT THE SUBATOMIC LEVEL.

THE RESULT WOULD BE...HIGHLY EXOTHERMIC.

ADMIRAL. YOU JUST DESCRIBED A *BOMB*.

ACCORDING TO OUR SPY SATELLITES, SOMETHING MAY HAVE COME OFF THE SHUTTLE BEFORE IT EXPLODED, YES?

SOMETHING... OR ***SOMEONE.***

WE'RE LOOKING INTO IT. THE MOST LIKELY EXPLANATION WOULD BE A MICROMETEORITE STRIKE.

THAT SAID, IT IS POSSIBLE, THOUGH UNLIKELY, THAT THE INCIDENT WAS ***COVER*** FOR THE ***THEFT*** OF THIS REPORT--

WHICH IN THE WRONG HANDS READS MORE LIKE AN ***INSTRUCTION MANUAL.***

MA'AM, ANY UNAUTHORIZED SHIP APPROACHING THE RING WOULD BE WARNED AWAY OR DESTROYED.

THE DEGREE OF LOGISTICS REQUIRED TO PULL OFF THE KIND OF OPERATION YOU'RE DESCRIBING--

DUARTE WROTE THE ***BOOK*** ON MILITARY LOGISTICS. ***LITERALLY.*** I'D SAY THAT'S THE LEAST OF THEIR CONCERNS.

NOW I HEAR ***MEDINA*** MAY STILL HAVE A ***DRAGON TOOTH*** PROBLEM. AND WE NEVER DID ACCOUNT FOR ALL OF THE STEALTH COMPOSITES ***STOLEN*** FROM ***MARS***--

MY GOD. COULD THEY BE THAT INSANE...?

MA'AM?

THEY'RE PLANNING TO DESTROY THE RING.

ARROKOTH - HYDROCARBON REFINERY
IN THE KUIPER BELT

TIGHTBEAM: ENCRYPTED
SOURCE: [REDACTED]
DECRYPT: RUNNING... OK
ATTACH: AWCITRS/TS-SCI
MESSAGE FOLLOWS

MOTHERLODE

GIVE 'EM HELL

FOR LACONIA.

CHAPTER TEN

MEDINA STATION
IN THE RING SPACE

BELTALOWDA! THE TIME IS COME!

WE CANNOT ALLOW THIS MOMENT TO PASS US BY!

WE CANNOT ALLOW BULL TO STEP DOWN AS SECURITY BOSMANG FO MEDINA---FO DA BELT---WITHOUT FIRST HE GIVE SPEECH!

McCLINTON'S

BUT BEFORE HE BORE US TO DEATH, LET MI SAY FROM DA HEART---TAKI, PAMPA!

I AIN'T NOBODY'S GRANDPA, YA LITTLE SHIT...

CHRIST, I HATE THIS SPOTLIGHT SHIT. I WAS HOPIN' TO SLIP AWAY QUIET---BUT MULLIGAN HERE HAD OTHER IDEAS.

BUT HEY, AT LEAST THE BOOZE IS FREE, RIGHT?

SO BACK IN THE DAY, I WAS NOBODY. ***FRED JOHNSON*** PULLED ME OUT A FOXHOLE AN' UP THE WELL, I HAD NO IDEA WHAT THE FUCK I WAS DOIN' OUT HERE.

I DIDN'T ***BELONG.*** JUST ANOTHER EARTHER OFF HIS TURF. MISSIN' THE SKY, NOT KNOWIN' WHICH WAY'S UP.

BUT YOU BASTARDS MADE ME INTO SOMETHIN' ELSE. WHAT I ALWAYS SHOULDA BEEN. A ***BETTER MAN.***

AND I'M--DAMMIT, I'M ***PROUD*** TO HAVE SERVED WITH EVERY ONE OF YOU MOTHERFUCKERS.

YAM SENG!

BULL! BULL! BULL!

AN' YOU KNOW I'LL BE LEAVIN' YOU IN GOOD HANDS. ***MULLIGAN*** HERE'S BEEN MY ***RIGHT HAND*** FOR, WHAT, ***FIVE YEARS*** NOW?

HE WAS ***BORN*** TO THIS SHIT--- UNLIKE ***THIS*** OL' GRUNT!

MI ONLY ***SUCCEED*** YOU, *BERATNA.* NEVER REPLACE.

DE BACA, MULLIGAN. REPORT TO OPERATIONS.

...

...YEAH, MAYBE HOLD THAT THOUGHT FOR A SECOND.

SERIOUSLY? I WAS HALF OUT THE DOOR.

OUR *DRAGON TOOTH* PROBLEM.

DUSTER BONE MEDS, *KEYÁ*. WE ***LOOK***, *BOSMANG*.

MULLIGAN'S TASK FORCE HAS BEEN TURNIN' OVER EVERY PUSHER THEY CAN LAY HANDS ON. SO FAR, *NADA*.

FOR ALL WE KNOW, THAT WAS THE LAST OF 'EM. THINGS HAVE BEEN REAL QUIET.

QUIET IS THEIR *METHOD*.

TEN YEARS SINCE THE SOHIRO SABOTEUR ON *ROCINANTE* NOW THREE DEAD IN A DRUG DEAL GONE SOUR?

THAT'S TWICE WE GOT LUCKY. AND LUCK IS A FINITE RESOURCE.

SAY YOU'RE RIGHT. SO WHAT DO YOU SUGGEST? THOSE BLACK OPS JERKOFFS KNOW HOW TO BLEND IN.

THEY WERE *MARTIAN* ONCE. WHICH MEANS THEY USED *OSTEO-X.*

AND NOW, WE HAVE A *BLOOD TEST.*

THERE'S A *TELL!* OUTSTANDING! ANY SUSPECT MULLIGAN ROUNDS UP, HE CAN RUN THEIR BLOOD THROUGH THE--

NO. *EVERYONE* WILL BE TESTED.

EVERYONE...

...ON *MEDINA?*

COMPULSORY.

STARTING WITH YOUR SECURITY TEAM.

THAT...IS GONNA PISS OFF A *SHITLOAD* O' *BELTALOWDA*. I MEAN WE'RE TALKIN' *THOUSANDS*.

WE LACK *FO* MANPOWER!

WHICH IS WHY BULL'S RETIREMENT WILL HAVE TO WAIT. FOR NOW.

WE DRINK WHEN YOU'RE DONE.

...YOU'RE THE BOSS, *BOSMANG*.

SECURITY! OPEN UP!

IS--IS THERE A PROBLEM?

JUST ROUTINE, MA'AM.

...

...WHAT THE FUCK, YOU SHOW FACE AT MY *BUNK*? IS OUR *DEAD DROP* BLOWN?

DRUMMER'S PEOPLE FIGURED OUT A LATENCY TEST FOR *OSTEO-X*. THEY'RE RUNNING EVERYONE. *EVERYONE.*

THE WHOLE *STATION*? THAT'S *INSANE*--

IT'LL PIN MY PEOPLE. ANYONE MCRN.

I WAS NEVER--

SHUT UP AND *LISTEN*, MAYES!

YOU'RE GONNA HIT THE MEDICAL DATABASE. SPIKE IT SO WE FLAG NEGATIVE.

DO IT FAST. START NOW.

I--I DON'T HAVE REMOTE ACCESS, BUT--EVEN SO, I'D-- I'LL NEED YOUR TEAM'S *DNA* PROFILES, SO I CAN TELL THE SYSTEM WHO TO OKAY...

...BUT IF ANYONE *FINDS* THAT CODE, YOU'LL HAVE HANDED THEM YOUR *IDENTITIES!*

WE'RE INTO THE COUNTDOWN. CAN'T CHANGE THE PHYSICS.

OUR BLACK ICE IS EN ROUTE, AND THE HAULER'S RIGGED TO MEET IT. THE SECOND THAT HAPPENS, IDENTITIES WON'T MATTER A *DAMN.*

I STILL NEED TO FINISH UP ON THE RAILGUNS, THE COMM LASER--

I *TOLD* YOU WHAT I NEED, MAYES. RIGHT NOW.

I CAN HANDLE YOU AS AN ASSET, OR A LIABILITY.

WHICH IS IT?

...ASSET

GET TO WORK.

MI PENSA YOU LONELY, KOPENG. YOU WANT FO COMPANY?

GETTIN' THERE. AFTER A FEW MORE OF THESE, MAYBE.

WHY WAIT? NOT YOUR TYPE?

MAYBE SESATA MI MORE YOUR SPEED. OR MAYBE BOTH...?

YOU TWO REALLY SISTERS? 'CAUSE THAT'S KINDA FUCKED UP.

YOU GOT THE SCRIP, WE BE WHATEVER YOU WANT US TO BE.

SOYA, IF YOU NOT INTERESTED--

I SAID IT'S FUCKED UP...

I DIDN'T SAY I WASN'T INTERESTED.

ROCINANTE

I'M STILL READING A FAULT ON THE DORSAL PDC HATCH SERVO.

I ASKED AMOS TO FIX IT. WHERE THE HELL IS HE?

PROBABLY PASSED OUT IN A BROTHEL. HE'S NOT ANSWERING COMMS.

IT'S FINE, I'LL TACKLE IT ONCE I'M DONE HERE.

I'D ASK CLARISSA, BUT SHE'S ON MEDINA— GETTING A *BLOOD WASH.*

WAIT, I THOUGHT *ROCI* COULD HANDLE CLARISSA'S ENDOCRINE THING?

NOT ANY MORE.

SHE DIDN'T WANT YOU TO WORRY, BUT...LATELY SHE'S NOT DOING WELL. HER IMPLANTS ARE BASICALLY EATING HER ALIVE.

SHE'S A GOOD MECHANIC. WE'RE LUCKY TO HAVE HER.

I KNOW. BUT IT'S LIKE SHE'S...FADING AWAY.

SHE GOT A FIVE YEAR PROGNOSIS--AND THAT WAS TWENTY YEARS AGO. SHE'S ON BORROWED TIME, AND SHE KNOWS IT.

I'M NOT GIVING UP ON HER. *EVER.*

OF COURSE NOT. I'M JUST SAYING, SOONER OR LATER, WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO THINK ABOUT MAKING PLANS FOR...

...AFTER.

I'M NOT READY TO HAVE THAT CONVERSATION--

SHIT.

WHAT?

DRUMMER. SOMETHING'S UP.

SOMETHING *BIG.*

—SEVEN THOUSAND GENETIC PROFILES TO CROSSMATCH, AND *YOU'RE* THE ONES SUPPOSED TO BE OUT THERE GETTING ME THE *SAMPLES!*

INSTEAD YOU DROP *THIS* ON ME? *NOW?!*

DIS COME FROM STRAIGHT FROM *BULL.* *BOSMANG* SAY, HIS TEAM TEST CLEAR.

SIMPLE UPDATE, *KEYÁ?*

LISTEN, *HOTSHOT,* I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT'S ON THAT CHIP YOU'VE BEEN WAVING AROUND, BUT IF YOU THINK I'M ABOUT TO INJECT SOME *RANDOM CODE* INTO MY DATABASE WITHOUT *AUTHORIZATION,* YOU'RE OUT OF YOUR *MIND.*

WHAT IF I ASK NICELY?

I HEARD VOICES. IS THERE A--

OH.

SECURITY. GO BACK TO BED, *DZHEMANG.*

Y'KNOW WHAT? ALL OF A SUDDEN...

...I'M NOT SLEEPY.

RRRAAAGH--!

GAH--!

AAAAAHH--!

P-PLEASE, DON'T--

DON'T KILL ME

HHOOLP--!

"THE MICHAEL SOUTHER. THE FREDERICK LEWIS. GOVERNOR KNIGHT. ARCADIA ROSE. ONTARIO. TALWAR. SEVERIN AND ODACHI.

"THAT'S HALF THE EMC JUPITER FLEET--ALL BURNING RINGWARD.

"UNTIL THAT BATTLE GROUP ARRIVES, THE ONLY THING THAT STANDS BETWEEN SOL RING AND THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY--

"...IS US."

OKAY, I THINK I SPEAK FOR ALL OF US WHEN I SAY--

WHAT THE *FUCK?*

LACONIAN SLEEPER AGENTS, EMERGING ***NOW?*** NOT A COINCIDENCE. AND THE ***THREAT*** IS MORE ***IMMINENT*** THAN WE FEARED.

THEY STOLE A CLASSIFIED REPORT FROM EARTH— ***"ASYMMETRIC WARFARE CONTINGENCIES."***

INNER– SPEAK FOR A ***TERRORIST INSTRUCTION MANUAL.***

EARTH BELIEVES THEY'RE PLANNING TO ***DESTROY SOL RING***— AND THE STOLEN REPORT WOULD SHOW THEM ***EXACTLY*** HOW TO DO IT.

TWO SHIPS TRANSIT. ONE FROM THE RING SPACE, ONE FROM THE DARK SIDE.

RING SPACE

RING

DARK SIDE

EXOTIC INCIDENT

IF THEY EMERGE INTO SOL SYSTEM, SAME TIME, SAME PLACE...THEY CANNOT CO-EXIST.

BOOM.

JESUS CHRIST EARTH AND MARS WOULD BE CUT OFF FROM THE RING COLONIES-- *FOREVER!*

MAYBE THAT'S WHY WE NEVER HEARD FROM LACONIA--

THEY NEVER GAVE A *SHIT* ABOUT EARTH AND MARS. THEY JUST WANNA DEAL 'EM OUTTA THE GAME!

ALL THESE YEARS...HOW COULD WE HAVE BEEN SO COMPLACENT? SO *BLIND?*

OUR EYES ARE OPEN NOW. SO WE *LOOK.*

ANY UNAUTHORIZED SHIP APPROACHING SOL RING--ESPECIALLY FROM THE *DARK SIDE*--WE CONSIDER AN *EXISTENTIAL THREAT.*

ANY *UNAUTHORIZED* SHIP?

WAIT, THAT'S *INSANE!* YOU NEED TO SHUT DOWN *ALL* TRANSIT, BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!

EASY FOR YOU TO SAY! A *THOUSAND* COLONIES NEED TRADE *TO SURVIVE!*

WITHOUT FOOD, WATER, LIVE SOIL—*THOUSANDS* DIE. *MILLIONS.*

EARTH AND MARS ARE COMING TO TAKE CONTROL OF SOL RING.

WE HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE. BUT THIS TIME, THE BELT IS *UNITED*—AND WE HAVE GUNSHIPS OF OUR OWN.

GATAMANG FERONTE, MOWTENG AND *TYNAN* WILL KEEP WATCH ON THE SOL SIDE OF THE RING.

VODYANOI AND *KOYO FELOTA* GUARD THE RING SPACE, WHILE *SCHEHERAZADE* AND *MIDIAN* ARE INBOUND FROM THE COLONIES.

SO WHAT ABOUT THE *ROCI*?

OKAY, SHE'S SHOWING HER AGE—BUT SHE CAN STILL PUNCH ABOVE HER WEIGHT. WE SHOULD BE OUT THERE.

ROCINANTE IS HERE. SO SHE GUARDS *MEDINA*...

...WHERE THE *DRAGON TEETH* ARE.

SOL SYSTEM

WAKE UP, FARTHER.
TIME TO TALK.
HNNGH...?
...WELL, SHIT.
THIS AIN'T WHAT I PAID FOR.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

MONZCARRO--ICE HAULER
IN THE RING SPACE

ATTENTION ALL SHIPS! THIS IS PRESIDENT **CAMINA DRUMMER** OF THE TRANSPORT UNION.

ALL **SOL TRANSIT PERMITS** ARE HEREBY **REVOKED.**

FOR REASONS OF MUTUAL SECURITY, I AM IMPOSING A TEMPORARY **EXCLUSION ZONE.**

ANY SHIP APPROACHING WITHIN TEN THOUSAND KLICKS OF SOL RING WILL BE **DISABLED** OR **DESTROYED.**

ON THIS IT WOULD BE UNWISE TO TEST MY RESOLVE.

MEDINA STATION

I KNOW YOU HAVE LOADS TO HAUL. MOUTHS TO FEED. BUT WE ARE **BELTERS.**

WHAT WE DO HERE, WE DO FOR THE GOOD OF **ALL.**

GETTING UGLY DOWN ON LEVEL THREE. BONE TEST PROTEST TURN ***RIOT.***

GREAT. JUST WHAT WE NEED RIGHT NOW.

ALRIGHT, LET'S GET DOWN THERE.

SOME RETIREMENT PLAN, *KEYA*? GET YOUR SKULL BROKE ON YOUR LAST DAY?

I SEEN THAT FEED AND IT NEVER END WELL FOR THE SIDEKICK. WHICH WOULD BE YOU.

SO THAT MAKES YOU WHAT, THE STAR OF THE SHOW? YEAH, FUCK YOU, *BELTALOWDA.*

DRUMMER NEED YOU IN ***OPS,*** *BOSMANG!* I ROUND UP THE TASK FORCE, WE GO BUST SOME HEADS *FOSHO!*

SO HOW DO WE KNOW AVASARALA'S EVEN RIGHT ABOUT THIS *COLLIDIN' SHIPS* THING?

COULD BE WE'RE CHASIN' GHOSTS, SHUTTIN' DOWN THE RING ON THE OLD WOMAN'S HUNCH.

SHE HAS BEEN RIGHT BEFORE.

AND IF NOT? IT GIVES US *DIPLOMATIC AMMUNITION* WHEN HER *FLEET* ARRIVES.

BELTALOWDA ARE UNHAPPY ABOUT THE BONE DENSITY TESTS. NOW THEY HAVE SOMETHING *NEW* TO BE ANGRY ABOUT.

IF THEY BLAME *EARTH*, SO MUCH THE BETTER.

JESUS. A THOUSAND NEW WORLDS TO EXPLORE TOGETHER, BUT... NOTHING EVER CHANGES, DOES IT?

NOT REALLY.

SO. GATE'S LOCKED DOWN? WHAT THE FUCK?

EASIER IF YOU JUST COME UP HERE AND SEE FOR YOURSELF.

ARE YOU OKAY...?

HONESTLY, I DON'T KNOW.

THERE'S A LOT GOING ON, I HAVE NOTHING TO DO, AND IT'S KINDA MAKING ME CRAZY.

ALRIGHT, I'M ON MY WAY.

FEELS LIKE I MISSED SOMETHING... AND FOR THE LIFE OF ME, I CAN'T FIGURE OUT WHAT.

MAYBE YOU CAN.

THIS ISN'T WORKING. GIVE HIM ANOTHER SHOT.

AND IF IT KILLS HIM?

LET ME WORRY ABOUT THAT.

IT'S REAL SIMPLE. GIVE US WHAT WE NEED, OR WE CUT YOUR FUCKING ***HEAD*** OFF.

WHAT ARE YOU, TOO STUPID TO BE ***AFRAID?***

IT'S NOT LIKE THAT. I MEAN, I'M NOT HAPPY, IF THAT'S WHAT YOU'RE LOOKIN' FOR.

DO WHAT YOU GOTTA DO.

WHY THE *FUCK* ARE YOU BEATING ON HIM? I TOLD YOU TO USE THE *SERUM!*

WE DID! IT'S NOT WORKING. OR MAYBE IT *IS,* BUT...

IT'S LIKE HE'S TELLING THE TRUTH AS *HE* SEES IT-- JUST NOT WHAT WE *NEED.*

I DON'T KNOW IF THE ISSUE'S NEUROLOGICAL, OR PSYCHOLOGICAL, OR...

HELL, MAYBE IT'S JUST A BAD BATCH..

PAWN SACRIFICE. THEY WERE CAUGHT ON CAMERA PICKING HIM UP.

RIGHT. OF COURSE. NO LOOSE ENDS.

I COULD PUT THIS WEAPON TO YOUR HEAD, THREATEN YOUR LIFE. BUT WE BOTH KNOW YOU'RE ALREADY GOOD AS DEAD.

EVERYONE BREAKS IN THE END. IT'S JUST A QUESTION OF HOW MANY BODY PARTS I HAVE TO REMOVE FIRST.

AND WHEN IT COMES TO TORTURE, I KNOW WHAT I'M DOING. DO YOU BELIEVE ME?

YUP.

SO LET'S START OVER.

I NEED THE ACCESS CODES FOR THE *ROCINANTE*. AND YOU'RE GONNA GIVE THEM TO ME.

'BOUT DAMN TIME. I CALLED SECURITY AN HOUR AGO!

YEAH, THEY'RE A LITTLE BUSY RIGHT NOW? FOLKS AREN'T TOO HAPPY ABOUT THESE DRUG TESTS.

NO SHIT. NEITHER WAS *HE.*

JESUS. WHAT HAPPENED?

SHE HAPPENED. YOUR BUDDY *MAO.* TORE HIM APART WITH HER BARE HANDS, SHE DID. NEVER SAW THE LIKE.

SHE TOOK A BULLET. BROKE DAMN NEAR EVERY BONE IN HER HAND. DIDN'T EVEN BLINK.

SHE'S STABLE NOW. PHYSICALLY, I MEAN. BUT DON'T YOU DARE UNDO THOSE RESTRAINTS. NOT WHILE I'M ON SHIFT.

ATTAGIRL. DIDN'T KNOW YOU STILL HAD IT IN YOU.

SORRY...

I'M S-SORRY...

IT'S OKAY. YOU REST EASY, SOLDIER. I'LL TAKE IT FROM HERE.

ALRIGHT, CLARISSA DOESN'T THROW DOWN LIKE THAT WITHOUT A DAMN GOOD REASON. SO LET'S HEAR IT.

THIS ASSHOLE DEMANDED ACCESS TO THE DATABASE, MASTER SYSTEM. SOME ***WHITE-LIST*** HE WANTED TO UPLOAD.

I TELL HIM I NEED CLEARANCE FROM ***BULL***, HE PUTS A FUCKING ***GUN*** TO MY HEAD.

YEAH, THAT'S NOT EXACTLY STANDARD M.O.

LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT THIS LIST OF HIS.

...

...YOU HAVE GOT TO BE FUCKING KIDDING ME.

WHOEVER THEY ARE, THEY KNOW WHAT THEY'RE DOING. THERE AREN'T MANY PLAUSIBLE WAYS TO BLOW UP A RING, BUT...

THIS ONE MIGHT JUST WORK.

EXOTHERMIC EVENT

RING

THAT'S NOT EXACTLY REASSURING.

OPA SHIPS ARE PATROLLING SOL SIDE, BUT NOTHING SO FAR. WE JUST GOT A TIGHTBEAM FROM OKSANA ON THE *GATAMANG FERONTE*...

WE'VE COMPLETED OUR INITIAL SENSOR SWEEP. NO UNCORRELATED CONTACTS.

*THOUGHT MAYBE WE'D CAUGHT SIGN OF A SHIP RUNNING **DARK.** DRIVE PLUME RESIDUAL TRACE? BUT SPECTRAL ANALYSIS CLEARED IT AS ETHANE, METHANE VAPOR, NOTHING MORE.*

CONTINUING PATROL. OKSANA OUT.

ETHANE. METHANE. HYDROCARBONS...

MONZCARRO— THAT'S THE ICE HAULER FROM ***ARROKOTH,*** RIGHT? OUT IN THE KUIPER BELT...

AND RIGHT NOW, SHE'S JUST HANGING AROUND NEAR SOL RING. WAITING...

YOU'VE GOT THAT LOOK. TELL ME.

I MEAN THIS IS JUST SPECULATION, BUT...

ALRIGHT, WE'RE ASSUMING THESE LACONIANS— ***DRAGON TEETH,*** WHATEVER— WANT TO TRANSIT TWO SHIPS INTO THE SAME SPACE. SO WE'RE LOOKING FOR SHIPS.

BUT WHAT IF IT'S ***NOT*** A SHIP? WHAT IF IT'S A BIG, FUCK-OFF CHUNK OF ***ICE?***

ALL THEY NEED IS ***MASS.*** A HAULER AND A MILLION TONS OF ICE, MASHED TOGETHER AT THE SUBATOMIC LEVEL?

THE ENERGY OUTPUT WOULD BE ***INSANE.***

OKSANA SAID TRACE AMOUNTS OF *VAPOR.* BUT IT'S TOO COLD OUT THERE FOR ICE TO EVEN MELT, LET ALONE VAPORIZE—

YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT *WATER* ICE—BUT GUESS WHAT, WE'RE NOT ON THE CANTERBURY ANY MORE.

ARROKOTH'S A *HYDROCARBON* REFINERY. WAY OUT IN THE *KUIPER BELT,* ETHANE AND METHANE ARE COLD ENOUGH TO BE *ROCK SOLID.*

BUT THEY'RE ALSO A LOT MORE *VOLATILE* THAN WATER—AND THE RING'S A LOT CLOSER TO THE *SUN.*

OH, *SHIT.*

RIGHT?

OKAY, SO LET'S SAY THEY GRAB AN ICEBERG, WAY OUT WHERE NOBODY'S LOOKING. STEALTH IT.

MONZCARRO ACCELERATES IT TOWARD THE DARK SIDE OF THE RING, THEN RELEASES IT EN ROUTE...

THE OUTER ICE STARTS TO BOIL OFF UNDER THE STEALTH COAT, BUT THERE'S STILL PLENTY OF MASS...

MONZCARRO BURNS AHEAD OF THE ICE. TRANSITS INTO THE RING SPACE. HELL, MAYBE OFFLOADS LEGITIMATE CARGO, RIGHT HERE AT MEDINA...

...AND IT ALL LOOKS PERFECTLY INNOCENT. ROUTINE.

JESUS.

IF I'M RIGHT—AND I HOPE TO FUCK I'M NOT—*MONZCARRO* IS GONNA TRY AND BURN FOR SOL RING.

BECAUSE FOR THAT PLAN TO WORK, SHE'D HAVE TO TRANSIT AT THE *EXACT SAME MOMENT* AS THE ICEBERG SHE ALREADY LAUNCHED, DAYS OR WEEKS AGO.

WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR A KILL SHOT. BUT THEY ALREADY FIRED THE BULLET—AND WE DIDN'T EVEN NOTICE.

WE NEED TO TELL *DRU*—

I HEARD EVERY WORD.

MOWTENG - READY A BOARDING PARTY. FULLY ARMED. TYNAN - COVER THEM.

I WANT MONZCARRO'S REACTOR POWERED DOWN AND HER CREW DETAINED FOR QUESTIONING. EXPECT HEAVY RESISTANCE.

NAOMI, YOU KNOW THE PHYSICS BETTER THAN ANYONE.

MESSAGE OKSANA. GET HER TO MAP THAT VAPOR TRACE. IF IT PLOTS RINGWARD, WE KNOW YOU ARE RIGHT.

AND IF I'M WRONG?

WAIT! WAIT A SECOND. I KNOW WHAT I MISSED.

I KNOW WHY I REMEMBER THE NAME MONZCARRO.

WHERE IS MULLIGAN RIGHT NOW?

YOU WANT TRUTH? ALRIGHT, HERE IT IS.

YOU'RE A *TOOL.*

LIKE, I PUT MY NAME ON MY SHIT, PEOPLE KNOW IT'S MINE.

SOMEBODY BORROWS ONE OF MY TOOLS, THEY KNOW TO PUT IT BACK WHERE IT BELONGS...

BUT YOU? YOU'RE A *LOST TOOL.*

DUARTE *USED* YOU. BUT HE NEVER BOTHERED TO PUT YOU BACK WHERE YOU BELONG. SO NOW YOU'RE FLOATIN' AROUND OUT HERE, FUCK ALL USE TO ANYBODY.

AND Y'KNOW WHAT MAKES IT FUNNY? HE DOESN'T EVEN GIVE A SHIT.

IF HE DID, HE'DA COME GOT YOU BY NOW.

BEST THING YOU COULD DO IS JUST WALK AWAY, START OVER. I BEEN THERE.

BUT YOU'RE NOT THE TYPE. WHICH LEAVES YOU PRETTY MUCH FUCKED.

NOW, I GUESS THAT'S PROBABLY NOT WHAT YOU WANNA HEAR...

BUT YOU KNOW IT'S THE *TRUTH.*

MOTHERFUCKER—!

NNGH!

SIR. THE TIMETABLE...

WE'RE READY. ALL THE WORK WE'VE PUT IN, THE YEARS WE'VE SACRIFICED.

IT'S TIME TO GO HOME.

I'LL WORK ON BURTON. IF HE WON'T GIVE UP THE CODES, THERE ARE OTHER WAYS TO CRIPPLE *ROCINANTE* BEFORE *KUNAI* GETS HERE—

KUNAI ISN'T COMING FOR US! SHE'S COVERING ***MONZCARRO.***

SIR? BUT OUR PEOPLE...THE CREW...

HAVE THEIR ORDERS. AS DO YOU.

YOU GET THE *ROCINANTE* OR THE RECYCLER. YOUR CHOICE.

YOU HAVE ONE HOUR.

YOU KNOW HE'S *NUTS*, RIGHT?

YES.

SO WHAT ARE WE EVEN DOIN' HERE?

IF I DON'T FOLLOW HIS ORDERS, HE'LL KILL ME.

THEY FOLLOWED ORDERS. HOW'D THAT WORK OUT?

THE WAY HE TALKS ABOUT SACRIFICE... IT'S ONLY EVER OTHER PEOPLE.

HE'LL SACRIFICE EVERYONE BUT HIMSELF.

I'M NOT LIKE THEM. I WAS NEVER MCRN. THE BLOOD TEST, IT WON'T WORK ON ME.

WHAT YOU SAID BEFORE, ABOUT WALKING AWAY, STARTING OVER...?

MAYBE... MAYBE THERE'S STILL A CHANCE FOR ME.

IF I LET YOU GO...

WOULD YOU KILL HIM?

FUCK YEAH.

RELEASE

COOL.

LET'S NOT DO THAT AGAIN.

HE'S HEADING FOR THE *ROCI*.

SPEC OPS ARE TRAINED TO ACCESS MARTIAN SHIPS, FOR COUNTER-PIRACY. THERE'S STILL A CHANCE HE CAN BYPASS WHATEVER PROTECTIONS NAGATA INSTALLED.

I NEED A GUN.

TAKE IT. BUT I WAS NEVER A PART OF THIS, OKAY? YOU NEVER SAW ME.

THING IS, I DID SEE YOU. YEARS BACK, I MEAN. IT'S BEEN BUGGIN' ME.

THEN I REMEMBERED. COMM RELAY STATION--THAT WAS YOU, RIGHT?

I-- I WAS BARELY INVOLVED...

YOU PEOPLE TRIED TO KILL NAOMI.

LISTEN, WHATEVER YOU THINK, I-- I DIDN'T--

WAIT! PLEASE, YOU DON'T *UNDERSTAND--*

YEAH, CAP? WE GOT A PROBLEM.

CHAPTER TWELVE

MEDINA STATION

ROCINANTE REQUESTING EMERGENCY CLEARANCE FOR DOCKING CLAMP RELEASE!

UFF—!

DENIED, ROCINANTE. POWER DOWN YOUR REACTOR AND PREPARE TO BE BOARDED.

NO CAN DO, MEDINA. REACTOR EMERGENCY. WE DON'T GET HELL AND GONE, WE COULD TAKE YOU ALL WITH US.

ROCINANTE, YOU'RE STILL HOOKED INTO OUR SYSTEM—AND YOUR REACTOR LOOKS FINE.

POWER DOWN! IMMEDIATELY!

FUCK IT. GO TACTICAL.

AYE, SIR. DEPLOYING PDCS—

SIR, I'M READING A FAILURE ON DORSAL PDC HATCH SERVO. BRINGING THE OTHER FIVE TO BEAR.

THEN GIVE 'EM A FIVE-G BURN, RIGHT IN THE FACE. SOMETHING TO REMEMBER US BY.

ALERT! DECOMPRESSION HAZARD!

TENSHAI KUXAXU XASHI

...

...AW, SHIT!

FUCKITING, HOLDEN—?!

IT'S NOT US!

MULLIGAN JUST **STOLE** THE **ROCI!** HE'S HEADING FOR **LACONIA!**

THE ENTIRE ***MARTIAN DEFECTOR FLEET*** COULD BE WAITING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THAT GATE!

IF *ROCINANTE* DEFIES DUARTE'S ORDER AND ENTERS ***LACONIA*** SYSTEM... IT COULD TRIGGER ***ALL-OUT WAR!***

THIS WHOLE DAMN THING WAS JUST A ***DISTRACTION...***

AND WE FELL FOR IT.

I FELL FOR IT.

...

...HEY. CAP.

YOU— READIN' THIS?

AMOS

AMOS! WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU-?

ROCI. PDC— HOUSING.

CAN'T— TALK. HARD. BURN.

GONNA— TRY AN'— SCRAM— REACTOR.

THEY'LL KILL HIM!

THEY CAN *TRY.*

OUTSTANDING WORK, AMOS. HANG TIGHT. WE'RE GONNA TRY AND FIGURE OUT A WAY TO GET YOU OUT OF THERE.

DO IT— FAST.

HOW? EVERY OTHER GUNSHIP IS OFF GUARDING *SOL GATE!*

EVEN IF WE COMMANDEER ONE OF THESE FREIGHTERS, NONE ARE FAST ENOUGH TO CATCH THE *ROCI* IN TIME.

ALRIGHT. LESS TALK, MORE HUSTLE. HOLDEN, YOU'RE WITH ME. DOCK 37.

LET'S MOVE!

WAIT, WHERE ARE WE GOING...?

"TO SEE AN OLD FRIEND!"

RAZORBACK

I WISH I HAD BETSY FOR THIS.

I WISH WE HAD A *BATTLESHIP...* INSTEAD OF AN UNARMED ANTIQUE!

DON'T YOU LISTEN, *RAZIE.* HE DIDN'T MEAN THAT.

...

I THINK YOU MAY HAVE PICKED UP SOME BAD HABITS FROM ALEX.

TENYE WA CHESH GUT, RAZORBACK.

BULL— STATUS ON THE ICE HAULER *MONZCARROT*

SHE STOPPED RESPONDING. MAYBE JAMMED. MAYBE DICKIN' US AROUND.

TYNAN AN' MOWTENG *ARE* MOVIN' IN TO BOARD HER. STILL A FEW MINUTES OUT.

RAILGUN COMMAND-- CONFIRM TARGET LOCK ON *MONZCARRO.*

NEGATIVE! *RED LIGHT ON REACTOR CONTAINMENT! BAD CODE!*

WE ***SHUT DOWN*** *OR WE NOVA!*

BOSMANG! MONZCARRO ***LIT DRIVE!***

SHE BURNING *FO* ***SOL RING--!***

SHIT! NAGATA CALLED IT.

TYNAN, TARGET *MONZCARRO'S* REACTOR AND ***FIRE.***

TYNAN, ***RESPOND--!***

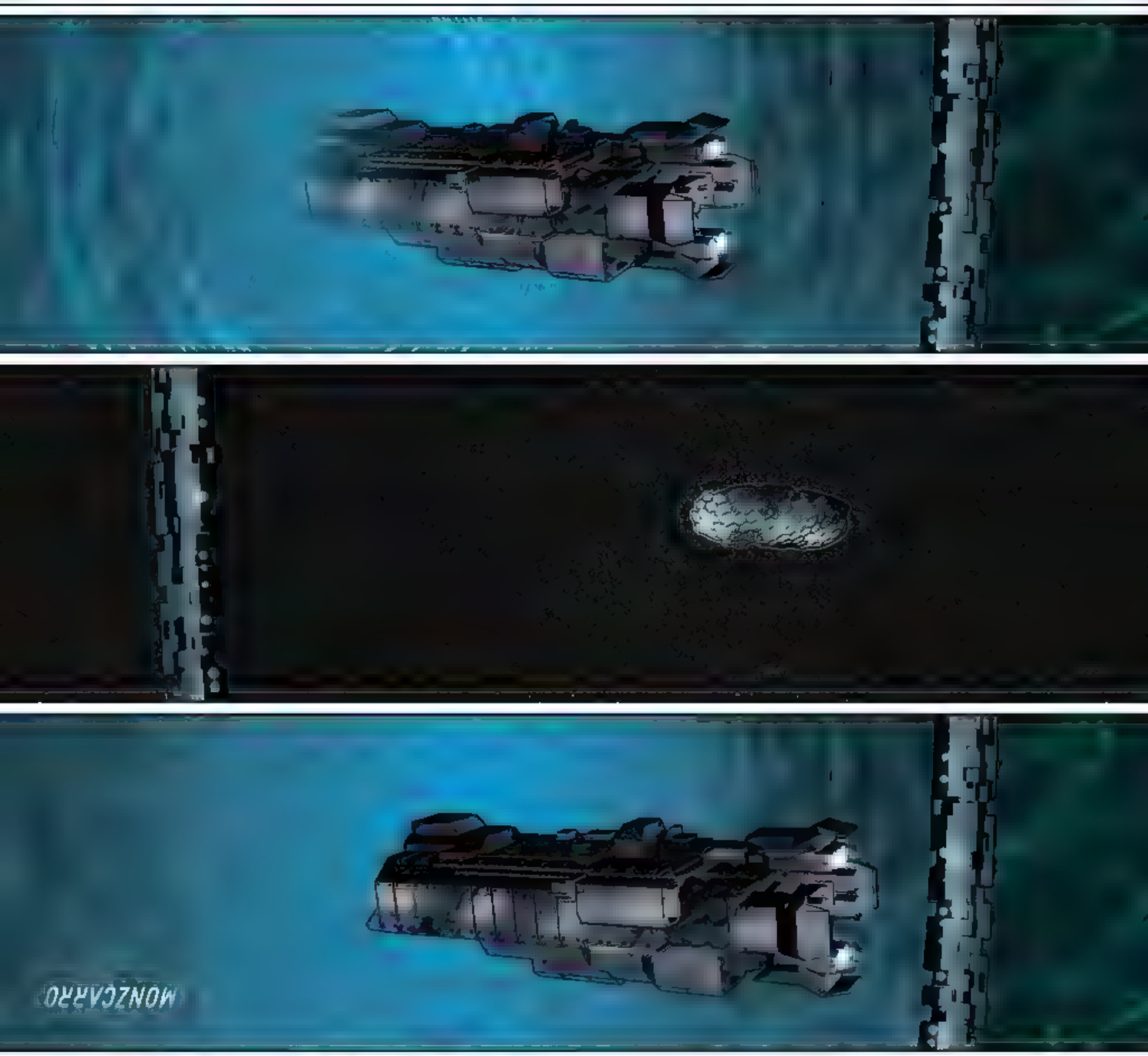
KUNAI

"*FAST MOVERS!* I READ THREE--FOUR TORPEDOES!"

TYNAN

TYNAN AND *MOWTENG* ARE BOTH *CRIPPLED!*

TORPEDOES NOT COME FROM *MONZCARRO*, SO WHERE...?


MONZCARRO

...

OKSANA?

FUCK.

JIM! I DON'T KNOW IF YOU CAN READ THIS, BUT...

THEY HIT ***SOL RING*** AND SPIKED THE ***RAILGUNS!*** SOME KIND OF *GAMARRA* CODE!

THEY'VE ALSO RIGGED OUR ***COMM LASER*** TO TAKE OUT THE ***MINEFIELD*** ON THE LACONIA SIDE.

THAT MUST BE WHY THEY STOLE CHERNIV'S RESEARCH-- NAILING THE RIGHT FREQUENCY TO PIERCE THE GATE...

SHIT, THEY'VE BEEN PLANNING THIS FOR ***DECADES!***

THE GOOD NEWS IS, OUR SENSORS ARE ***BLIND***--WHICH MEANS THE *ROCI'S* PROBABLY ARE TOO.

WHATEVER HAPPENS NOW, IT'S UP TO YOU.

AT LEAST YOU'RE ON THE FAR SIDE FROM THE BLAST. I'M SENDING YOU JUMP CALCULATIONS— BUT BE READY TO OVERRIDE YOUR SUIT THRUSTERS IF NECESSARY.

ROCI'S STILL HELLBENT ON THE LACONIA GATE. IF SHE MANEUVERS AT THAT VELOCITY, YOU COULD END UP MASHED AGAINST THE HULL!

OH. PLUS THERE'S PROBABLY A SHITLOAD OF HARD RADIATION FLYING AROUND OUT THERE, SO DON'T HANG ABOUT.

REASSURING.

THANKS.

DID WE-- LOSE--SOL GATE?

DUNNO. MAYBE.

COMING UP--ON *ROCI.*

TOO WIDE? PDCS TAG US.

TOO CLOSE? WE *MELT.*

NGH.

THE FUCK...?

WHY'VE WE *CUT THRUST?*

REACTOR'S GONE INTO SHUTDOWN MODE! I DON'T UNDERSTAND—

WAIT. UNIDENTIFIED SHIP COMING UP IN OUR DRIVE SHADOW. LOOKS LIKE...A *RACER!*

OUR *PDCS* ARE READING *DRY*— AND WE'RE TOO CLOSE FOR TORPEDOES!

WE HAVE A STOWAWAY. *FIND THEM!*

I'LL DEAL WITH THE BOARDERS *MYSELF.*

REACTOR CHAMBER LOOKS CLEAR...

I'LL CHECK THE CONSOLE.

CAP, IF YOU'RE COMIN'?

NOW'S GOOD.

ON OUR WAY!

WE'RE ON! NOW WE JUST NEED TO--

CONTACT!

...

...FUCK!

BOBBIE, GET DOWN--!

HE'S USING OUR *DRONES* AS *MOBILE COVER!*

I'LL BURN THROUGH MY AMMO BEFORE I GET A CLEAR SHOT AT HIM!

WE HAVE TO FIND A WAY INSIDE! *FLIP AND BURN*--BEFORE WE HIT *LACONIA* GATE!

STAY LOW AND MAKE YOUR WAY ROUND TO THE CARGO LOCK! I'LL LURE HIM AWAY!

WAIT, THAT'S A *SUICIDE RUN!* IF ANYONE'S GOING DOWN WITH THE SHIP...IT SHOULD BE *ME!*

YEAH. BUT YOU'RE FORGETTING ONE THING, CAP. THAT ARSEHOLE BETRAYED *MARS.*

WHICH MAKES IT *PERSONAL*

HEY, FUCKNUTS! THEY NEVER TEACH YOU TO *SHOOT STRAIGHT* IN BASIC?

NO WONDER YOU ENDED UP A DRAGON TOOTH! NOT ENOUGH *DUST* IN YOUR BLOOD!

YOU *FAILED* MARS!

BUT THAT DREAM ENDURES—ON *LACONIA!*

SHAME YOU WON'T *LIVE* TO *SEE* IT!

MOUTHY LITTLE GRUNT. WHERE'D YOU GO?

WHERE ARE YOU *HIDING...?*

GAAGH--!

BITCH!

UNGH!

UHHF--

HE'S OFF THE SHIP!

FLIP AND BURN! RIGHT NOW!

NOT... GONNA MAKE IT... IN TIME!

BOBBIE... I'M SO SORRY--!

NEVER DONE THIS BEFORE.

FUCK IT.

HANG ON! DECEL'S GONNA HIT LIKE A HAMMER!

WELCOME... TO *LACONIA*... MOTHERFUCKER!

AAAAGHHH--!

YOU WERE *RIGHT,* MA'AM.

THAT'S USUALLY THE CASE. I'M AFRAID YOU'LL HAVE TO BE MORE SPECIFIC.

PRODUCT FROM *STEEPLEJACK*--OUR *DEEP COVER* ASSET WITHIN MCRN FLEET COMMAND.

THE GENETIC PROFILES WE RECEIVED FROM THE TRANSPORT UNION--CROSS-MATCHED AGAINST MARS' *BLACK OPS* DATABASE.

MULLIGAN'S REAL NAME WAS *DHILLON.*

MCRN COMMANDER, FORCE RECON. ASSIGNED TO *OPERATION DRAGON TOOTH...*

AND AN EARLY RECRUIT TO DUARTE'S BREAKAWAY FACTION.

MCRN

IT SEEMS HIS UNIT PLAYED A PIVOTAL ROLE IN TRANSFERRING MARTIAN WEAPONS AND STEALTH TECHNOLOGY TO THE *INAROS* FACTION.

WE ALSO ASSESS, WITH MODERATE CONFIDENCE, THAT DHILLON MAY HAVE BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN BOTH THE ASSASSINATION OF *ANDERSON DAWES,* AND THE *BOMBING* OF THE *MARTIAN PARLIAMENT.*

HE WAS SUPPOSED TO DIE FLEEING MARS. DUARTE DOESN'T LIKE LOOSE ENDS.

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN USEFUL TO HAVE THIS INFORMATION TWENTY YEARS AGO, DON'T YOU THINK?

YES, MA'AM. THESE THINGS TAKE TIME.

AT LEAST WE DIDN'T LOSE SOL RING. SMALL MERCY. SO...WHAT NOW?

NOW, ADMIRAL...?

"NOW I CAN SLEEP."

NNGH...

HURTS... JESUS, IT HURTS.

WHERE... AM I...?

IT'S BETTER IF YOU DON'T MOVE.

I--I KNOW YOU. PAOLO CORTAZAR...

SO I. I MADE IT! THIS IS... LACONIA...?

OBVIOUSLY.

THANK GOD. I KNEW IT. KNEW I'D--

GAAHH--!

F-FEELS LIKE MY SKIN'S ON FIRE! PLEASE, DOC...GIMME SOMETHING FOR THE PAIN...

NO, THAT WOULD COMPROMISE THE EXPERIMENT.

MOST OF THE SKIN WAS BURNED AWAY, WHICH IS ACTUALLY QUITE HELPFUL. I CAN GATHER BETTER DATA WITH THE NERVE ENDINGS EXPOSED.

EXPERIMENT...?

COMMANDER DHILLON. I AM **HIGH CONSUL DUARTE.** I'LL HAVE YOUR REPORT NOW.

IT WOULD BE BEST IF YOU KEEP IT BRIEF

SIR, WE-- I...NEVER LOST *FAITH,* SIR.

TRAPPED BEHIND ENEMY LINES, I...INFILTRATED THEIR NETWORKS, AND... USED DIVERSIONARY TACTICS TO EFFECT AN EXFILTRATION.

TO MAKE IT *HOME,* SIR.

QUITE A DIVERSION. YOU CAME CLOSE TO DESTROYING A RING GATE VITAL TO LACONIA'S LONG-TERM INTERESTS.

S-SIR...?

YOU EXCEEDED YOUR MISSION PARAMETERS, COMMANDER. BY SOME SIGNIFICANT DEGREE.

MY STANDING ORDER WAS CLEAR. LACONIA GATE IS **CLOSED.**

YOU'RE A DISGRACE TO THE UNIFORM. HEREBY **DISHONORABLY DISCHARGED**--AND CONSIGNED TO THE **LACONIAN SCIENCE DIRECTORATE.**

FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH, YOU'RE ABOUT TO BECOME A PART OF SOMETHING MUCH GREATER.

A BETTER WORLD.

SIR? SIR—!

HEY! WHERE ARE YOU GOING? GET ME *OUT* OF THIS FUCKING THING!

LET ME OUT!

LET THEM IN.

SIR, MAY I.. CUT THE SOUND?

NO. I WANT TO HEAR IT.

THE *FUCK* IS THIS? THIS AIN'T *RIGHT!* I DID MY *DUTY!* YOU *LISTENING* TO ME—?!

N-NO--!

I--I SACRIFICED *EVERYTHING* FOR YOU PEOPLE! YOU HEAR ME? *EVERYTHING*--!

FOR LACONIA AAGHHH--!

THE END

COVER GALLERY

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ISSUE #9 COVER BY ZU ORZU

ISSUE #9 COVER BY JUNGGEUN YOON

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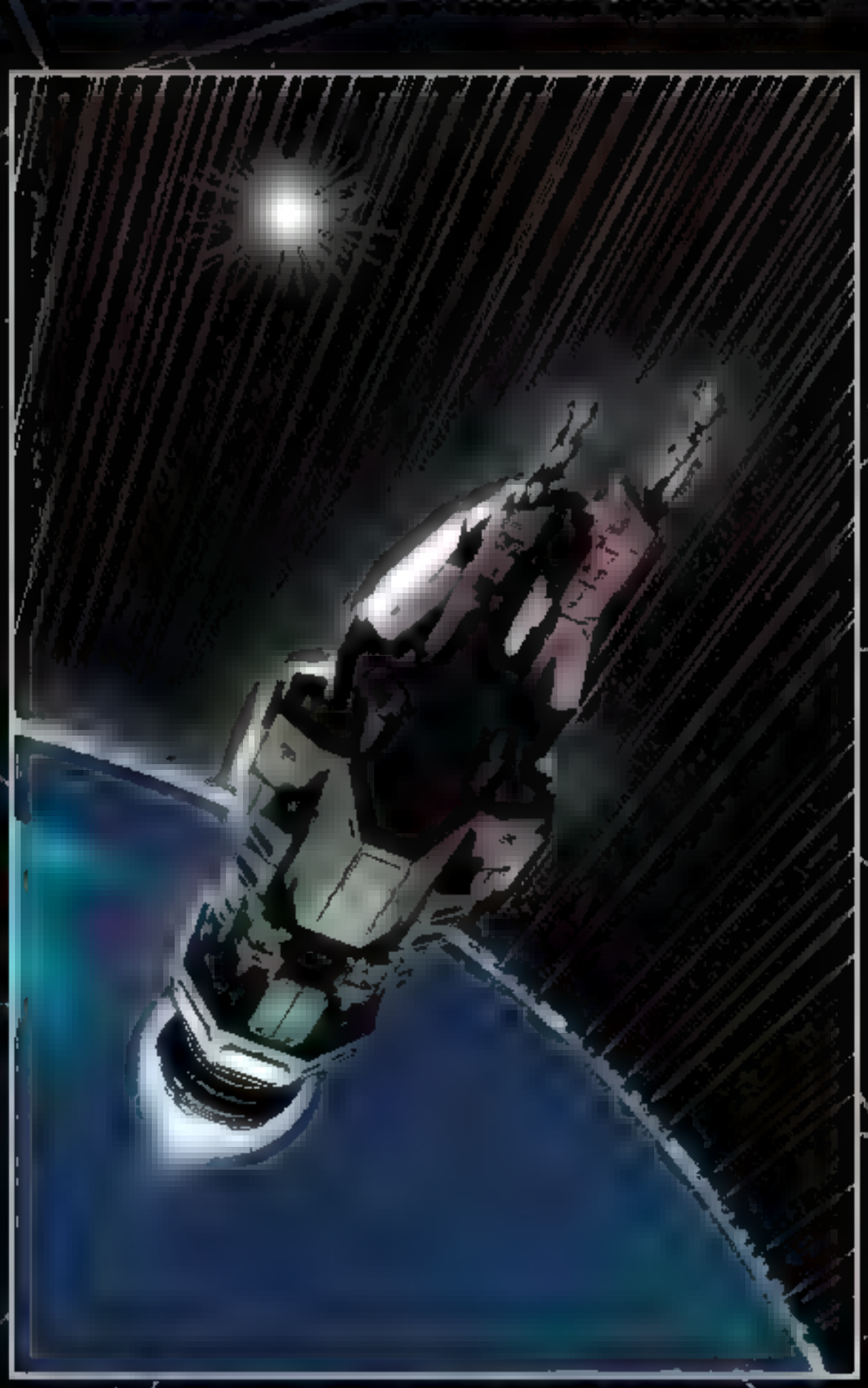

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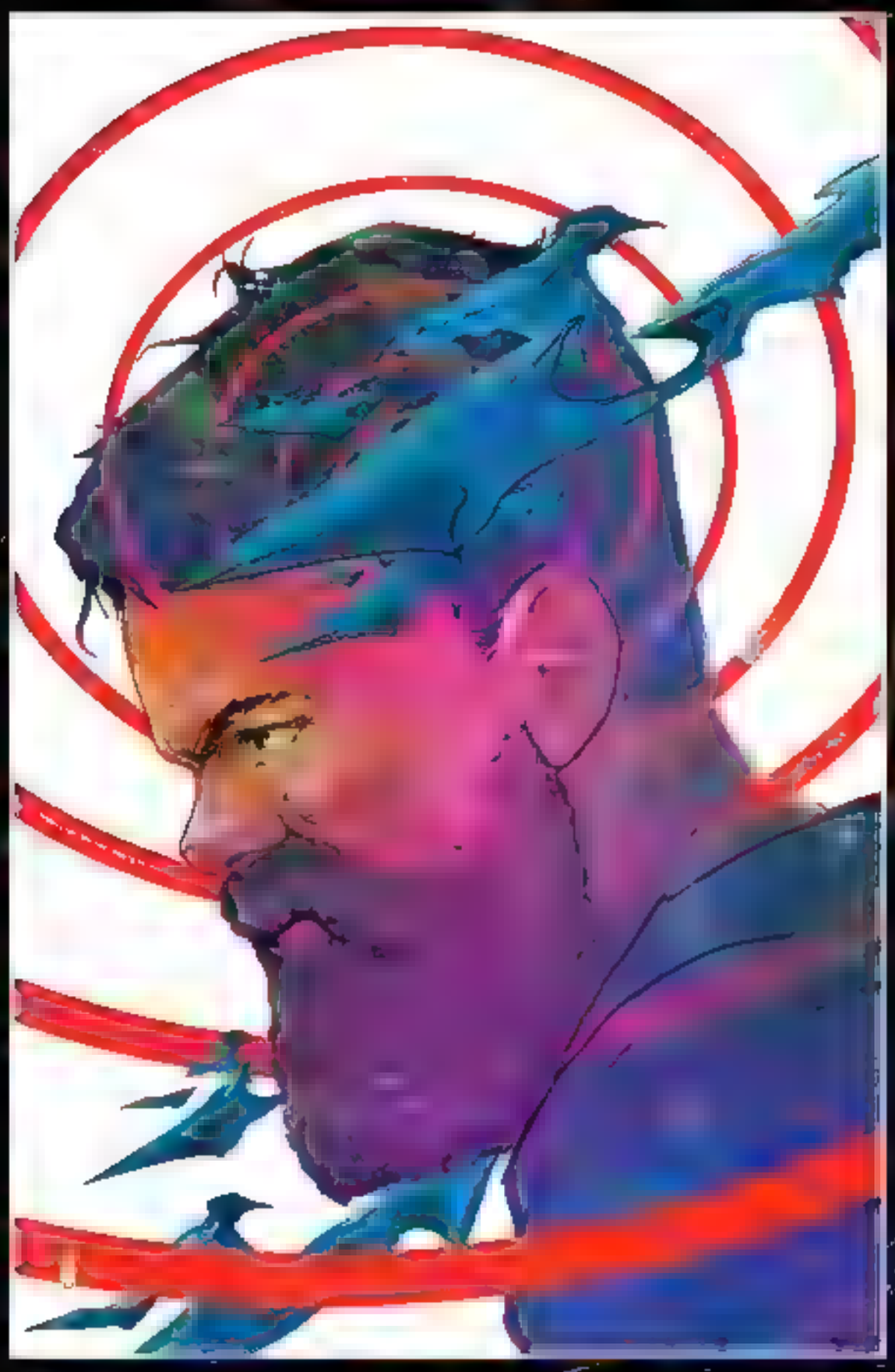

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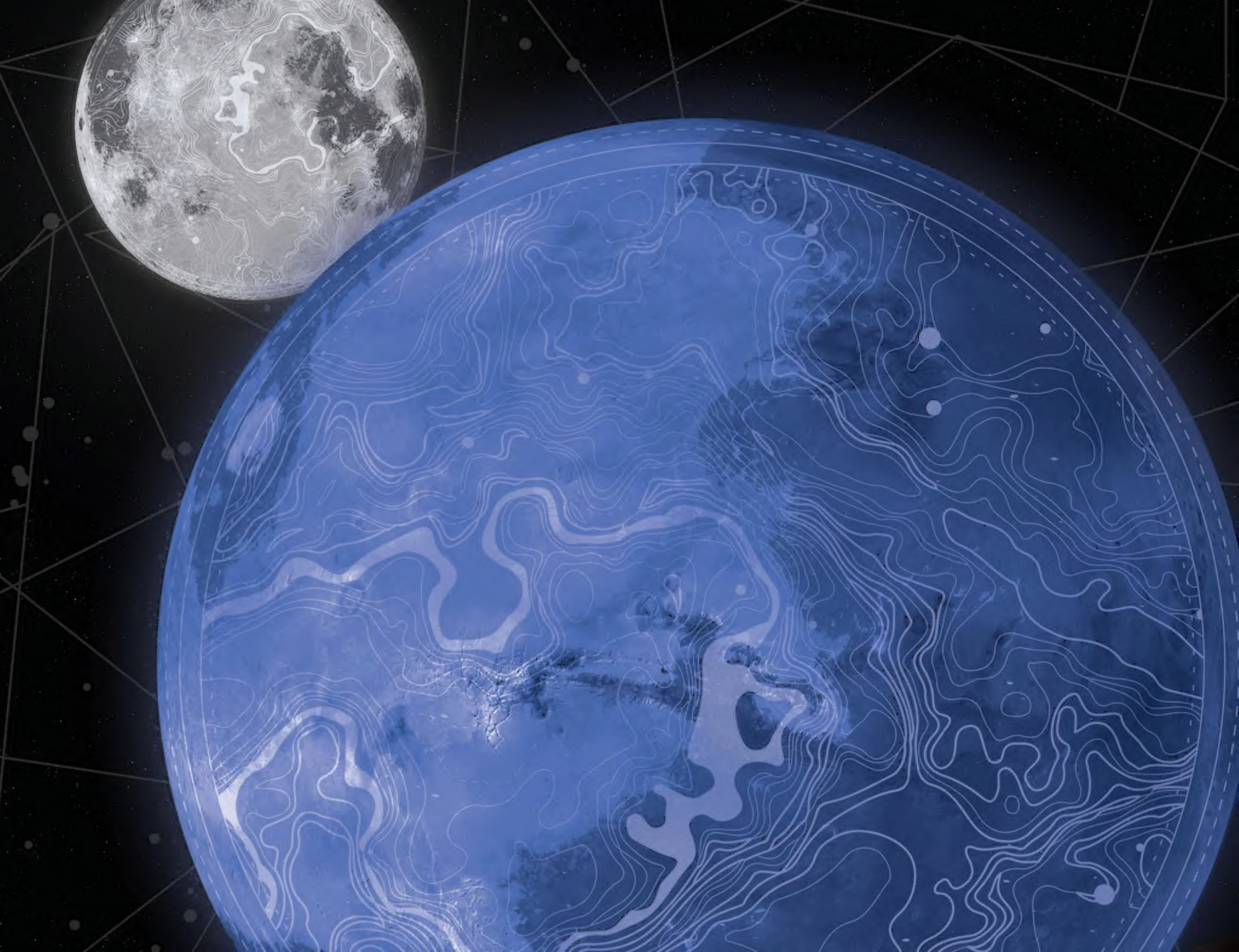

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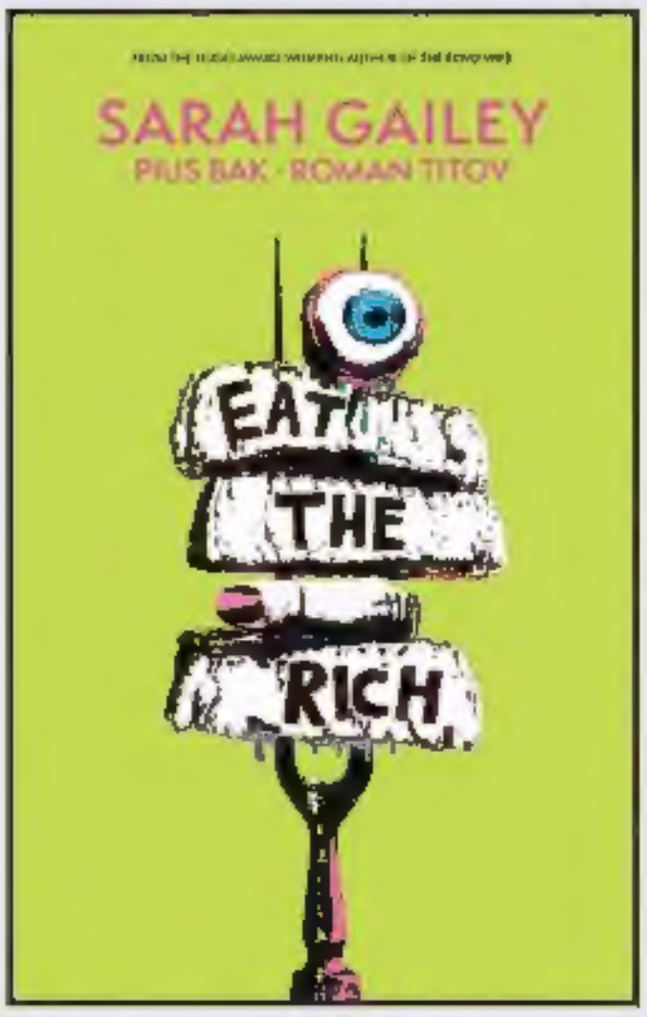

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10 years have passed.

Dhillon's covert network has spread uncontrolled, reaching its tendrils of influence deep into the heart of the Transport Union. As his shadow fleet prepares for their ultimate goal, Dhillon has just one more obstacle ahead of him: the crew of the aging Martian gunship Rocinante.

Meanwhile, the Transport Union controls all commerce between the thousand worlds that lie beyond the alien Ring Gates, but a conspiratorial cancer has spread through the Union's heart. A devastating attack in the Sol System suddenly brings peace to an end, leading to an all-out war on Medina Station as the lost Laconians battle for control! All that stands between the Dragon Teeth and their just reward are Transport Union railguns... and the crew of the Rocinante.

Dhillon will sacrifice everything to reach his promised land, but will the cost be worth it, or leave him to a regrettable fate?

Writer **Andy Diggle** (*Green Arrow: Year One*, *The Losers*) and artist **Francesco Pisa** (*Heavy Metal*) conclude the epic new storyline, set in the aftermath of the Hugo Award-winning TV show. Collects *The Expanse: Dragon Tooth* #9-12.

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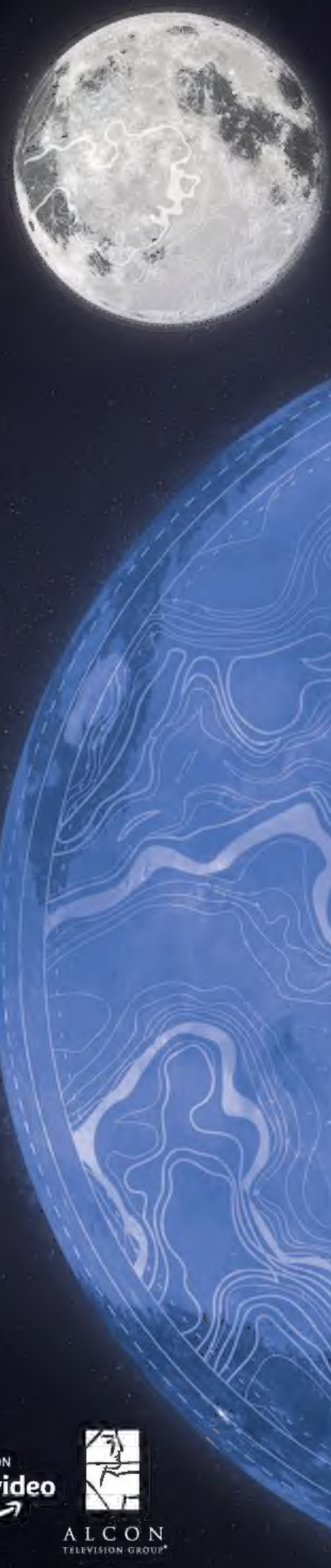

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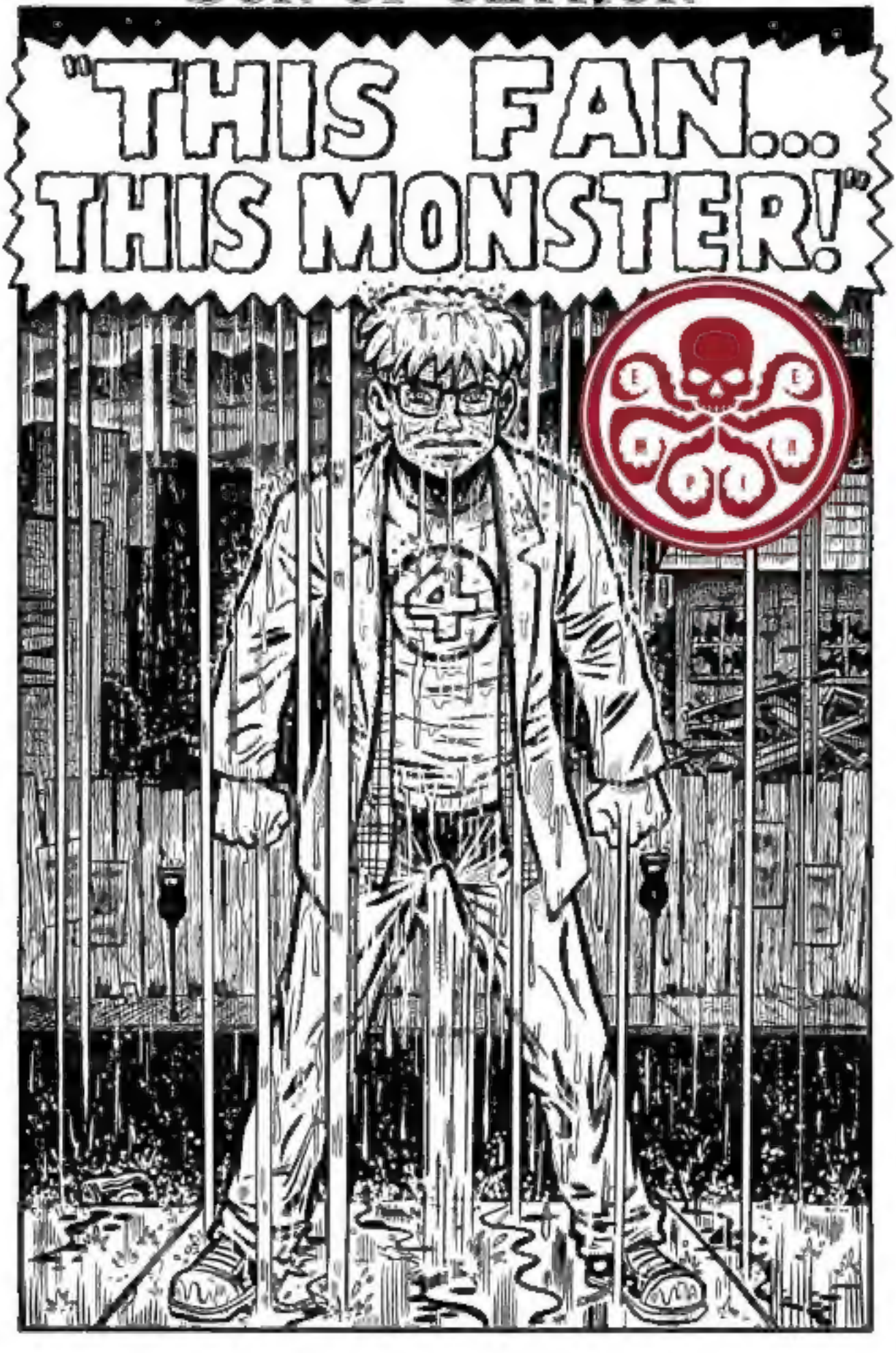
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